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ABSTRACT

This report discusses low-performing school districts identified by the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL). It is based on a 5-year contract in which SEDL tried to transform low-performing schools in Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas into high-performing learning communities. The first part of the paper describes the preparation that SEDL undertook for identifying the districts within the five states and the criteria for the selection of sites. A second section gives a brief account of SEDL's experiences in recruiting the sites and its initial work at each locale. The third section identifies and describes the sites in which SEDL is currently working and the status of the project at the end of FY01. The sources of data for the descriptions and charts are the site coordinator, site specialists, and Web sites maintained by the U.S. government or the five state education agencies. SEDL was working at 17 sites by the end of FY01. Most of these were composed of a district team and two schools associated with the district. Although the district sites range widely in size, they all face high poverty, low performance, and high percentages of minority population students. Each site is described in the report. (RJM)

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# A Description of SEDL's Intensive Sites

ED 467 666

## Working Systemically to Create High-Performing Learning Communities

RESEARCH REPORT

EA 031 781

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SEDL
Southwest Educational Development Laboratory

Southwest Educational Development Laboratory
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# A Description of

# SEDL's Intensive Sites:

**Working Systemically to Create High-Performing Learning Communities**

**Southwest Educational Development Laboratory**
**211 East Seventh Street**
**Austin, Texas 78701-3281**
**(512) 476-6861**

**May 15, 2002**

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## Introduction

In December of the year 2000, the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) was awarded the regional education laboratory (REL) contract to serve the five-state region of Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas. In its proposal, SEDL developed a scope of work that responded to the U.S. Department of Education's request for proposals to "transform low-performing schools into high-performing learning communities." This scope of work included fieldwork planned for multiple sites in each state and a research component to follow and document the work. The result of such work and its documentation would make possible the creation of procedural knowledge that would inform others about how such work might be enacted, under what conditions, with what potential for success. This work would be the focus of attention by a majority of SEDL REL staff.

This paper provides a report of the sites identified by SEDL for its work across the five-year contract. The first section of the paper is a brief commentary about the preparation that SEDL undertook for identifying the districts within the five states, and the criteria for the selection of sites. A second section gives a brief account of the experiences of SEDL in recruiting the sites and its entry and planned work in the sites. The third section identifies and describes the sites in which SEDL is working, and the status of the work at each of the sites at the end of FY01; this section is the major focus of this report.

The source of data for these descriptions and their accompanying charts are the site coordinator and site specialists who work in the respective sites, and web sites maintained by the U.S. government or the five state education agencies. Nomenclature for the type/location of the district has been accessed from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2000). The acronym, MSA from the NCES database, translates to a "Major Suburban Area".

### Preparation for Identifying Sites

SEDL, with its partner the Charles A. Dana Center at The University of Texas at Austin, developed a challenging proposal to transform low-performing districts and schools into high-performing learning communities. The staff explored each state's education reform environment and data that described districts across the five states — contextual and demographic data, and most importantly, student achievement data that characterized the districts as low performing. In so doing, the staff kept in mind the criteria, reviewed by the Chief State School Officer and/or senior staff in each state for the selection of sites:

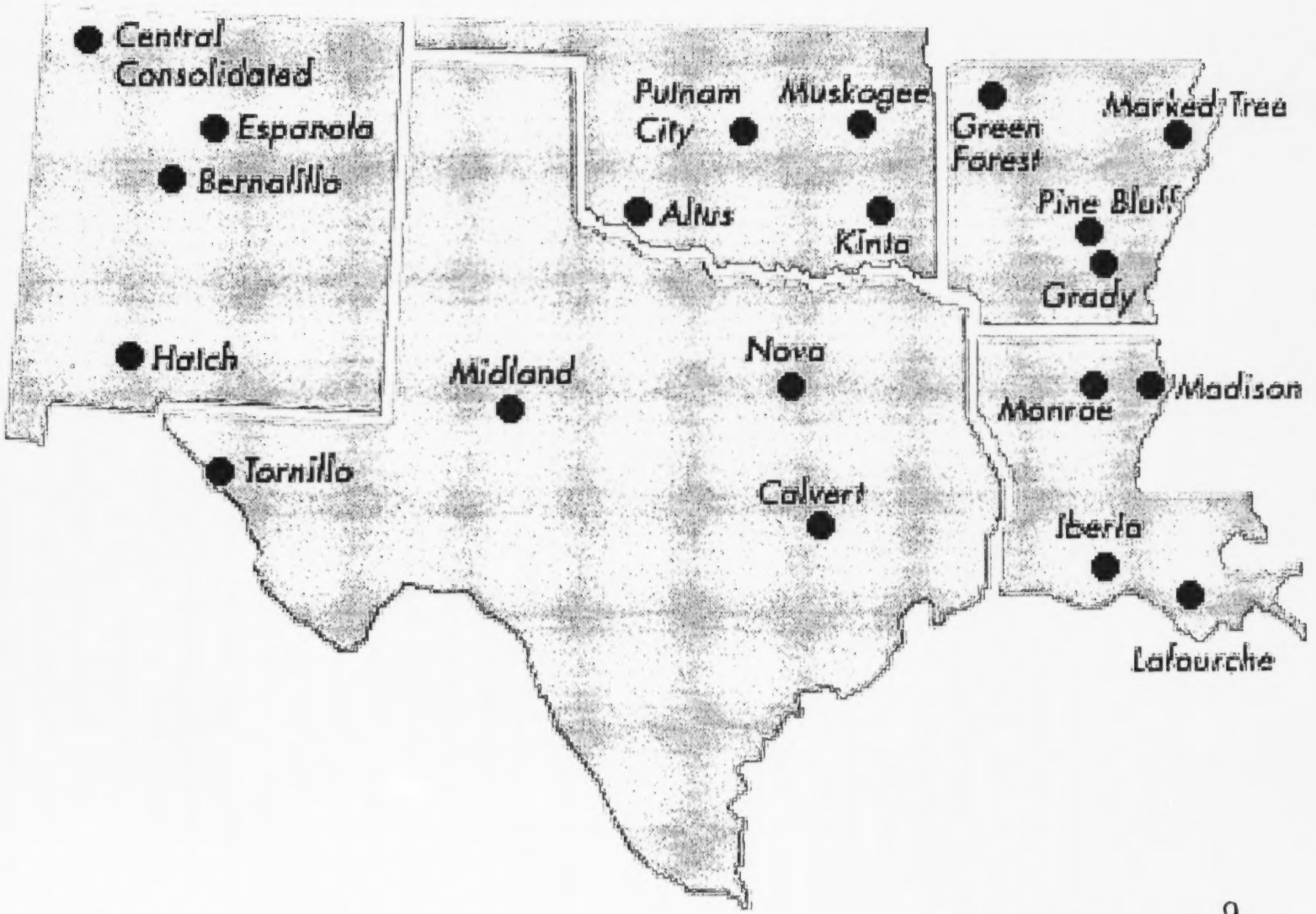
- Sites identified by the SEA (state department of education) as low performing in reading and/or mathematics over the past three years;
- Collectively the sites will reflect different student achievement profiles — low achieving in reading and mathematics, low in reading only or low in mathematics only; districts that have only low-performing schools versus districts that have only a small percentage of low-performing schools;

- Within a district, schools that are part of a feeder system (elementary, middle, and high schools) will be selected when possible to include schools at all three levels;
- Sites that enroll high concentrations of low-income students or students with diverse language or cultural backgrounds;
- One-fourth of the sites will be located in rural areas;
- Superintendent, principals, and faculty all agree to participate in the effort and to alter components of the system to the extent necessary to accomplish the project's goal;
- Leadership of the district and schools are willing to involve the faculty, staff, parents, and the community actively in building a high-performing learning community;
- Resources at the district and school levels will be made available to support this work; and
- A technical assistance provider from the SEA or an intermediate service unit is committed to working with the district, schools, and SEDL on this effort.

**Identification and Recruitment of Sites**

SEDL worked with its five SEAs to identify sites that met the above criteria; however, no site was required by its SEA to participate. Initial site meetings were conducted with the district superintendent and others recommended by the superintendent, such as a curriculum leader, principals, teacher leaders. For one of these meetings a board member was included. These meetings followed a letter and brochure sent by SEDL to the superintendent explaining the proposed work, the expectations for participating, anticipated outcomes of the work, and likely benefits. Depending upon the interest expressed at the initial meeting, follow-up meetings were scheduled with teachers at specific schools to solicit their interest in participating and to gauge their readiness. In addition, presentations were made at board meetings at two sites at the request of these sites. Once these meetings were completed and the district and one or two school(s) were committed to working with SEDL, a Memorandum of Understanding was drafted which all parties signed.

Because SEDL's support and assistance are not in the form of a specific program to be introduced to the school staff, many of the educators had difficulty understanding just what SEDL would do and how their students might benefit. Thus, recruiting sites was a complex process, with multiple visits, telephone calls, e-mails, and letters to explain this opportunity and how the sites and SEDL would work together productively. By the end of FY01, 17 districts and their accompanying one to two schools signed on and SEDL began its work in the sites, with a few beginning in August and others following. A map of the region and the location of all the sites are shown below.



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The three remaining sites were recruited in the first quarter of FY02. Two sites were recruited in Louisiana, Iberia Parish and Lafourche Parish. Iberia Parish is located in New Iberia, a small town, approximately 150 miles west of New Orleans. Approximately 15,000 students are enrolled in the district; approximately 55 percent of the students are white, 40 percent African American, and 5 percent other. Lafourche Parish is approximately 70 miles southwest of New Orleans in Thibodaux, classified as an urban fringe to a mid-size city. It too enrolls approximately 15,000 students; 73 percent of the students are white, 21 percent African American; and 6 percent other. Student achievement scores in both districts vary significantly, with several schools not meeting state growth targets. The third recruited site is Muskogee, OK, a large town approximately 70 miles southeast of Tulsa. The district enrolls approximately 6,700 students; 41 percent white, 29 percent African American, 26 percent American Indian, and 3 percent other. Muskogee has several schools that are not meeting state requirements for student performance.

SEDL anticipates that its work at each site will involve six stages:

- **Site Entry,** SEDL helps the site to establish a leadership team for carrying out the work, reviews the purpose of the SEDL partnership work and what the work will entail, and increases clarity about what the project can be for the site;

- **Data Scan,** SEDL staff collect a large array of information through reviewing site documents and through interviewing the superintendent and central office staff, principals of the schools, teachers at each grade level, one or more members of the school board, and parents and community members; this data collection is to gain a better sense of the status of the district and schools in terms of their reading and mathematics performance, their readiness for operating as a learning community, and an entry point for discussions at the district- and school-levels;

- **System Exploration,** leadership team members explore and identify factors that contribute to and detract from student performance in reading or mathematics, with the focus being to deepen the team's understanding of the issues at the different levels of the system;

- **Planning Action,** data are shared by the respective teams, and the agenda is to think more deeply about how to improve student achievement; such increased achievement could occur through readings and consulting experts and other resources to assist the team in its work of developing and refining strategies for changing current practice, sharing proposed strategies with other staff members to obtain reactions and feedback, and subsequently sharing with parents and community to increase the robustness of the plan;

- **Taking Action and Monitoring Results,** implementation of the proposed strategies is initiated, accompanied by the ongoing collection of data to identify changes that are needed;

- **Recycling for Continuous Improvement** occurs as additional issues emerge for which the team will need to explore possibilities that contribute to the reform effort; additional data are collected and analyzed and action strategies integrated into the ongoing work; this recycling reinforces the development and sustainability of high-performing learning communities in the district and schools.

## The Sites and Where They Are With SEDL's Support

Because of the differing reform environments and approaches to the improvement of schools across the five states, this section is organized by state, with a review first of Arkansas, followed by Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas. In each section there is a brief explanation of the state's reform efforts, and a description of the sites in which SEDL is working. Pertinent contextual factors further enrich the description, and finally, the stage at which the site is working is identified, as well as the specific focus of the partnership work.

### Arkansas

In Arkansas the governor appoints the nine-member state school board which appoints a director for the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE). The ADE is responsible for the implementation of legislation and school board policies. Critical issues in this state are low teacher salaries, shortage of teachers, low student achievement results, and school finance. Although charter schools have been authorized by the legislature, none have been established. Two statewide initiatives, *Smart Start* and *Smart Step*, address student improvement in reading and mathematics in the elementary grades. A poverty index fund has been established to help schools with high concentrations of poor children address unique challenges. Schools receiving these funds will be required to promote comprehensive strategies that address increased student achievement in reading, writing and mathematics in pre-Kindergarten–grade 1.

In 1983 the state legislature adopted a broad set of rules that are viewed as the keystone of the state's educational reform movement. A statewide systemic initiative was adopted by the legislature in 1991, which stated learner outcomes consistent with the National Education Goals. Subsequently, in 1997 the legislature adopted learning standards and these are defined in curriculum frameworks and in specific documents to guide educators in the state. Discipline-based documents describe what students must know and be able to do in each academic content area at grades 4, 8, and 12. The Arkansas Department of Education will be preparing *Refrigerator Curricula*, grade-level specific documents, translating the standards into simple, non-technical language easily understandable to parents and the public. Beginning in 2002, 30 approved professional development hours gained annually over a five-year period will be required to renew a teacher or administrator license.

The 1991 statewide systemic initiative included a mandate to develop student assessment tools. Criterion-referenced tests customized around the academic standards in the Arkansas curriculum frameworks were developed by committees of Arkansas teachers in partnership with a commercial testing organization. Using a variety of criterion-referenced and norm-referenced

tests, the assessment program is expected to test students at various grade levels on identified academic disciplines. Improvement plans must be in place and intervention provided for those not performing at grade level. Functions of the assessment system include improving student learning and classroom instruction, providing public accountability by establishing achievement levels and reporting on student achievement, providing program evaluation data, and assisting policy makers in decision making.

Expanding from a primarily district-based system to one that focuses on the school site as the unit of change, state accountability policies use multiple measures to identify districts that are in *academic distress* for three years. At such a time the district could be taken over by the state; to date, only two schools have experienced this action. Students in Kindergarten–grade 3 not performing at grade level will be required to participate in the ADE approved remediation program to be eligible for promotion to the next grade. The state accountability system is constructed in three tiers that focus on student performance results on tests, archival data, teacher credentials, professional development, and school safety. The school is held accountable for outcomes as well as process and non-academic indicators under the three-tiered system. High performing schools may be eligible for performance and growth trend and improvement rewards, which could include cash payments.

School improvement planning is mandated and each school is required to develop and implement a school improvement plan focused on state standards, professional development for teachers and administrators, student assessment and accountability for student achievement. Each school's plan is to be based on priorities indicated by student assessment and other data. Development of the plan begins with a structured process that leads to disaggregation of student achievement and other student data, and the identification of priority need areas with performance-based benchmarks that can be tracked during the implementation phase of the plan. This is followed by the selection of research-based (or linked to proven practices) strategies that will move students toward meeting the established benchmarks. Administrators, teachers, and other school staff and parents of the school must be involved in the development of this action plan for improvement.

**SEDL Sites in Arkansas**

As noted in the following chart, four districts and their related schools have been identified as SEDL sites, with Pine Bluff district serving the largest number of students and Grady the smallest. Information in addition to that contained in the chart about the districts and their schools follows.

**Grady School District**. Grady, AR is a small, rural community located in the Delta region approximately 25 miles southeast of Pine Bluff in the Mississippi Delta Region. The Noble Lake winds through the community and is a contributing factor for farming and fishing. The town has declined in size lately due to the inability of residents to earn a living on local farms. There are several vacant storefronts and homes, but a general store, furniture store, family-owned restaurant, produce company, post office, and several churches are vital businesses along the main corridor of the community. There are several industrial plants nearby. The

# Arkansas

| | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| General District Information | Name | Grady | | Green Forest | | Marked Tree | | Pine Bluff | |
| | Type Location | Rural Outside MSA | | Rural Outside MSA | | Small Town | | Mid Size City | |
| | No. of Schools | 2 | | 3 | | 2 | | 15 | |
| | No. of Teachers | 22 | | 98 | | 56 | | 440 | |
| | Percent of Teachers Certified | 86 | | 100 | | 90 | | 95 | |
| | No. of Students | 269 | | 1,216 | | 725 | | 6,500 | |
| | Per Capita Income | $14,482 | | $17,964 | | $17,967 | | $19,826 | |
| | Per Pupil Expenditure | $6,377 | | $5,102 | | $5,275 | | $5,505 | |
| | Focus of SEDL's Work | Reading | | Reading | | Reading | | Math | |
| General School Information | Name | Grady Elementary | Grady High | Green Forest Elementary | Green Forest High | Marked Tree Elementary | Marked Tree High | 34th Avenue Elementary | Sam Taylor Elementary |
| | Grade Range | K–6 | 7–12 | K–4 | 8–12 | K–6 | 7–12 | 4–6 | 4–6 |
| | Focus of SEDL Work | Reading | Reading | Reading | Reading | Reading | Reading | Math | Math |
| | No. of Teachers | 10 | 12 | 32 | 35 | 30 | 26 | 20 | 15 |
| | Percent with Advanced Degrees | 0 | 20 | 24 | 28 | 7 | 29 | 23 | 24 |
| | No. of Students | 126 | 143 | 480 | 414 | 387 | 339 | 340 | 268 |
| | Percent of Students Qualify for Free/Reduced Lunch | 88 | 83 | 61 | 75 | 70 | 64 | 82 | 86 |
| Race/Ethnicity of Students (percent) | African American | 95.2 | 94.4 | 0.2 | 0.0 | 33.6 | 34.2 | 97.1 | 95.5 |
| | American Indian | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.4 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 |
| | Asian American | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.4 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.3 | 0.0 | 0.0 |
| | Hispanic | 3.2 | 2.1 | 24.6 | 17.1 | 1.5 | 1.5 | 0.6 | 0.0 |
| | White | 1.6 | 3.5 | 74.4 | 82.9 | 64.9 | 64.0 | 2.3 | 4.5 |

economic base for the community is primarily agriculture (rice, soybeans, cotton, and vegetables), with a per capita income of $14,482 in 2000.

The Grady School District serves 269 students in the Kindergarten–grade 12 system, and 30 students in a pre-school program. There are two schools in Grady — the elementary school (Kindergarten–grade 6) serves 126 students, and the middle/high school (7–12) serves 143 students. Almost all of the students are African American at both the elementary (95 percent) and high school (94 percent) buildings. At the elementary school, 88 percent of students take part in the free or reduced lunch program; at the high school, 83 percent participate. The per pupil expenditure was $6,377 in 2000–2001.

In the 2000–2001 school year, the district had a 95 percent attendance rate, a 0 percent dropout rate, and a 100 percent graduation rate. Grady has not been rated by the new accountability system in Arkansas, but its student performance is quite poor. According to accountability data from 1998 to 2001, between 80 and 100 percent of the students in Grady scored below the *proficient* level in the reading and mathematics subtests on the criterion-referenced assessment. On the Stanford 9 norm-referenced assessment, between 60 and 80 percent of students scored in the bottom two quartiles in the areas of reading and mathematics.

The Grady School District has 32 teachers. The faculty and aides are primarily African American. About 86 percent of the faculty are fully certified. The superintendent is white, the two principals are African American, and all of the board members are African American. The superintendent has been in his position for three years, the elementary principal for five years, and the high school principal for four years.

The Grady schools had achieved positive results in a mathematics project prior to its discussions with SEDL. The reading program, on the other hand, lacked coherence. There were various reading initiatives that were fragmented across the grades. The existing leadership team of the superintendent and two principals thus chose to focus the SEDL work on reading. The work in Grady is in the beginning stage of *Systems Exploration,* identifying factors and root causes that appear to impact school improvement plans, standards, instruction, assessment, and high expectations for students and teachers. Grady has established a district leadership team with a wide spectrum of stakeholders including elementary and high school teachers, parents, and administrators. The district leadership team is in the process of developing guidelines and procedures for a site-based management system in the schools.

**Green Forest School District**. Green Forest School District is located in rural northwest Arkansas approximately 20 miles from the Ozark Mountains. The town of Green Forest lies in eastern Carroll County on a major U. S. highway. The northern border of the school district is the Arkansas-Missouri state line. The largest city near Green Forest is Fayetteville, AR located 65 miles to the west. The 2000 per capita income within the county was $17,964. Green Forest is primarily an agricultural community with the main industry of the community the poultry process plant (which adjoins school district property). There are also four feed mills, a die casting plant, and a ready-mix concrete plant. A significant number of residents travel outside the district for employment.

The Green Forest School District serves 1,216 students. The district's students are organized into three schools. The elementary school enrolls 480 students in Kindergarten–grade 4, the intermediate school enrolls 318 students in grades 5–7, and the high school enrolls 414 students in grades 8–12. Students fall into the following majority ethnic categories: white, 79 percent; Hispanic, 20 percent; and other 1 percent. The number of students eligible for free or reduced lunch varies from 61 percent at the elementary school, 58 percent at the intermediate school, and 75 percent at the high school. At the elementary school, 14 percent of the enrollment qualifies as limited English proficient (LEP) students; at the intermediate school and high school, the enrollment of LEP students are 7 percent and 10 percent respectively. The district expenditure per student was $5,102 per student in 2000–2001.

In the 2000–2001 school year, the district had a 93 percent attendance rate, a 1.7 percent dropout rate, and an 84 percent graduation rate. Scores on the state exams indicate that Green Forest students performed above state levels in both reading and mathematics. Slightly more than half (52 percent) of fourth-grade students performed at or above the *proficient* level in reading and writing literacy and 46 percent performed at or above this level in mathematics. In the eighth grade, 56 percent of students performed at or above the *proficient* level in reading and writing literacy, and 25 percent performed at or above this level in mathematics. However, changing demographics and an increased population of Hispanic students has alerted the district and its leadership to the needs of these students.

Green Forest School District employs 98 certified staff. The ethnicity of all professional staff is white, including the superintendent and principals. The superintendent has been in his position for 27 years, the elementary principal is in his first year, and the high school principal is in his fourth.

Since Green Forest has received assistance in mathematics for the past three years, the focus of attention for this work will be on reading. The district is in the *Systems Exploration* stage of work, exploring factors that seem to impact the district's improvement process. These factors appear to be the use of data, curriculum alignment, and facilitative leadership. SEDL is providing assistance in developing an organizational structure at the district level for decision making, in aligning curriculum, and in developing coherency in campus improvement initiatives.

**Marked Tree Public Schools**. Marked Tree, AR is located in the rural northeast corner of the state in Poinsett County, forty miles northwest of Memphis, TN in the Mississippi River Delta Region. The St. Francis River winds throughout the town and becomes a contributing factor to seasonal floods. The town, with a population of 2,800, has been experiencing a continual reduction of citizens in recent years with a parallel impact on the schools' population. Citizens say that people are leaving because of a lack of jobs. Some downtown storefronts are vacant. One store owner said that townsmen drive to the malls thirty minutes away. There are four industrial plants of varying natures within the city limits. Agriculture is also a part of the economy. In 2000, the per capita income for Poinsett County, where the district is located, was $17,967.

The schools serve 725 students with 56 teachers. The elementary school has 387 students; the secondary school enrollment is 339 students. Almost two-thirds of the students qualify for free or

reduced lunch and Title 1 services. There are no students identified as limited English proficient. In 1996, the teen violent death rate in Poinsett County was over three times higher than the Arkansas average and over four times higher than the national average. The district expenditure per student was $5,275 in 2000–2001.

The schools have in the past several years been in both fiscal and educational distress. For example, the district scored 10–13 points below the state average on the benchmark exams in reading and writing literacy in 2000–2001. Only 14 fourth grade students of 47, and 11 eighth grade students of 45, were *proficient* in literacy. Of these 25 students, only one scored *advanced*. Both the elementary and high schools reported a 100 percent attendance rate in 2000–2001. The high school had a 0.9 percent dropout rate and an 81 percent graduation rate in the same year.

The current superintendent and high school principal are in their second year of their assignment, and the elementary principal is in her first year. Both principals attended Marked Tree schools from the elementary grades and have extended families in the area. At Marked Tree Elementary School, the ethnic composition of the faculty is 93 percent white and 7 percent African American. At the high school, the faculty ethnic composition is 92 percent white, 4 percent African American, and 4 percent Hispanic. Almost 90 percent of the faculty are fully certified.

Marked Tree is currently in the stage of planning *Systems Exploration* with SEDL staff. The decision was made at the district level to focus on reading. No structures existed at the district level for shared decision making, and at the school level decisions are made without operational structures to gain input from the staff. Marked Tree created a central leadership team that includes a wide spectrum of stakeholders: parents, teachers, staff, and administrators from the elementary, secondary and district levels. The council is developing a vision and data sources related to the vision, which are meant to support the focus on reading. Council members have articulated guidelines and expectations for their roles, the schedule of meetings, and selection of members. The council meets several times a month.

**Pine Bluff School District**. Pine Bluff, AR is located in the southeastern portion of Arkansas, approximately 40 miles outside of Little Rock and is home to the University of Arkansas Pine Bluff. The population of Pine Bluff is approximately 55,000; the county per capita income is $19,826. Pine Bluff is the county seat of Jefferson county where the racial composition is almost evenly split between African American and white. Major employers in Jefferson County include Tyson Foods, Inc., Jefferson Medical Center, DA-Pine Bluff Arsenal, International Paper, Arkansas Department of Correction, WDC Construction, and four local school districts.

The Pine Bluff school district serves approximately 6,500 students in Kindergarten–grade 12 with one high school (grades 10–12), one junior high (grades 8–9), one 7th grade center, four elementary magnet schools (grades 4–6), seven primary schools (Kindergarten–grade 3), and one Montessori school (Kindergarten–grade 6). The Pine Bluff school district offers a wide range of special programs at 34th Avenue Fine/Performing Arts Magnet School and Sam Taylor Computer Technology Magnet School, the two campuses at which SEDL is working. These programs are intended to address the educational and social needs of the student population. The student enrollment at 34th Avenue is 340 and at Sam Taylor Elementary is 256. The attendance rate in

2000–2001 at both targeted elementary schools was 92 percent. The percentage of students eligible for free or reduced meals is 82 percent at 34th Avenue and 85 percent at Sam Taylor. The district per pupil expenditure was $5,505 in 2000–2001.

Arkansas 2000–2001 state accountability test results for Pine Bluff indicated that the number of students at the *proficient* level in reading and writing literacy and mathematics was very low. Scores on the state exam indicated that students throughout the district performed below state levels in both reading and mathematics. At 34th Avenue, scores revealed that 86 percent of fourth-grade students were below the *proficient* level in reading and writing literacy and 81 percent were below *proficient* in mathematics. At Sam Taylor, the scores for the same years showed that 95 percent of fourth graders were below *proficient* in reading and writing literacy, and 94 percent were below *proficient* in mathematics. The SEDL partnership will address issues related to mathematics instruction and student learning.

34th Avenue Elementary and Sam Taylor Elementary are assigned one administrator and have 15 and 11 classroom teachers, respectively, plus additional teachers for special area programs. All teachers on these campuses are fully certified by the state. Approximately 85 percent of the teachers are African American and the other remaining 15 percent are white or other. The superintendent and both principals have been in their positions for three years.

At the entry of the project into Pine Bluff, leadership activities were directed from the district level. That is, the district has a school improvement plan for which the building staffs are obligated to adhere. Principals request teachers to document their efforts/activities in following the plan; principals review the documentation regularly. SEDL is currently working to establish school leadership teams within the *Systems Exploration* stage in the schools.

**Louisiana**

A state school board, of eight elected and three appointed members in Louisiana, sets policy along with the state legislature. A student member selected through a competitive process serves on the Student Standards/Assessment Committee of the state board. The state superintendent who is appointed by the governor implements policy set by the board and the legislature. The state's current reform effort provides the unifying structure for standards, assessment, and accountability for the state. To implement the reform agenda with quality teachers, a Blue Ribbon Commission on Teacher Quality was formed in 1999 to make recommendations for teacher preparation, recruitment, professional development and compensation.

The Division of Student Standards and Assessment is responsible for creating and disseminating the state content standards and establishing the system that was supported later by a Goals 2000 grant. Legislation in 1997 established the expectation for additional standards. A broad range of individuals including classroom teachers were involved in their development. Content standards are anchored in five foundation skills: communication, problem solving, resource access and utilization, linking and generating knowledge, and citizenship. These standards were modeled after national standards and benefited from out-of-state experts for advice and review. The regional service centers, eight intermediate service agencies across the state, were provided

sessions in the use of the standards and they make available similar training for school districts in their areas of the state. Standards and support materials can be accessed electronically on the state web site.

As a result of concern that the student assessment test was too easy, a revised criterion-referenced test, LEAP 21, replaced the earlier LEAP test. The newer test is linked to the new state standards and will assess students at grades 4 and 8. The Iowa Test of Basic Skills, a norm-referenced test, has replaced the previous California Achievement Test for reading and mathematics in grades 3, 5, 6, and 7. Students in grade 9 are administered the Iowa Test of Educational Development. In addition, there are other tests that assess performance at various grade levels as well as a graduation exit test given in grades 10 and 11. There is a mandatory cut on scores above which students must score in order to be eligible for their diploma. Almost all students are expected to take the test; for example, the state expects that at least 80 percent of special education students will be tested. Test scores are reported to parents and schools via report cards by a division of the state department.

The state's current accountability system, established in 1998, rates schools based on their school performance score which is based on: the LEAP test (criterion-referenced test), Iowa test (norm-referenced test), student attendance, and dropout rate. Schools are assigned to one of six categories: schools of academic excellence, of distinction, of achievement, academically above average, below average, and unacceptable. In 1999, 47 percent of Louisiana schools were below average or unacceptable on their ratings, the bottom two categories. Such schools are assigned a growth target to be met in a two-year period. Outcomes of the growth target result in rewards or sanctions, with the possibility of corrective actions taken. When schools meet or exceed their growth target, they receive recognition and monetary awards. Lack of success in corrective action has further consequences and support, such as a full time "distinguished educator" assigned to the school. Extended periods of not meeting growth targets results in a reconstitution plan.

In 1999 state department staff developed a standardized school improvement planning process that includes a template, instructions and scoring rubric. This standardized school improvement planning process was created in concert with an external consultant, and all schools are required to complete the standard plan, which is judged by many in the state to be quite complex. The principal, teachers, and parents are expected to work on and sign off on the plan. The plan includes the development of a mission statement, goals, objectives, strategies, and an action plan. The action plan contains activities, persons responsible, target audience, timeline, expected impact, funding source, and evaluation. All schools are required to complete the standard plan.

**SEDL Sites in Louisiana**

By the close of FY01 two district sites and their related campuses had been identified for partnership with SEDL, with Madison Parish the smaller of the two and Monroe the larger.

**Madison Parish Public Schools**. Madison Parish is located in northeast Louisiana and, since its eastern border is the Mississippi River, it is considered part of the Delta Region. The economy is based on agriculture, and the primary crop is cotton. The per capita income is

# Louisiana

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| General District Information | Name | Madison | | Monroe | |
| | Type Location | Small Town | | Rural Outside MSA | |
| | No. of Schools | 6 | | 20 | |
| | No. of Teachers | 162 | | 633 | |
| | Percent of Teachers Certified | N/A | | N/A | |
| | No. of Students | 2,641 | | 10,701 | |
| | Per Capita Income | $15,193 | | $23,061 | |
| | Per Pupil Expenditure | $5,867 | | $5,286 | |
| | Focus of SEDL's Work | Reading | | Math | |
| General School Information | Name | Tallulah Elementary | Wright Elementary | Barkdull Faulk Elementary | Jefferson Upper Elementary |
| | Grade Range | preK–5 | preK–5 | preK–6 | 3–5 |
| | Focus of SEDL Work | Reading | Reading | Math | Math |
| | No. of Teachers | 34 | 48 | 18 | 25 |
| | Percent with Advanced Degrees | 53 | 37 | 50 | N/A |
| | No. of Students | 507 | 830 | 335 | 362 |
| | Percent of Students Qualify for Free/Reduced Lunch | 85 | 95 | 99 | 94 |
| Race/Ethnicity of Students (percent) | African American | 73.4 | 100 | 96.7 | 100 |
| | American Indian | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 |
| | Asian American | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 |
| | Hispanic | 1.2 | 0.0 | 0.6 | 0.0 |
| | White | 25.4 | 0.0 | 2.7 | 0.0 |

$15,193. Since the main town in the parish, Tallulah, is at the crossroads of two U.S. highways, there are a few motels, fast food restaurants and two truck stops in town.

There are 2,641 students in six schools in the parish – two elementary, two junior high and two high schools. All of the schools are located in Tallulah (two rural schools were recently closed due to decreasing student population). In previous years, the two Kindergarten–grade 12 feeder patterns were separated by race. At Tallulah Elementary, almost 75 percent of the students are African American, the remaining 25 percent are white, and 85 percent of all students qualify for free or reduced lunch. At Wright Elementary, all of the students are African American and 95 percent qualify for free or reduced lunch. The per pupil expenditure for 1999–2000 was $5,867.

In the state accountability system, both Tallulah and Wright Elementary Schools are rated as *below state average*. Tallulah Elementary did not meet its growth target for the 1999–2001 growth cycle, therefore it has entered *corrective action*. Wright Elementary exceeded its growth target and was recognized by the state with a financial reward. However, this school's acceptable student scores remain well below satisfactory, thus they will continue to work toward a higher level target with SEDL's help. Louisiana defines five levels of academic performance for students: *advanced, proficient, basic, approaching basic, and unsatisfactory*. At Tallulah Elementary, 55 percent of the fourth grade students scored below the *basic* level on the English language arts portion of the LEAP 21 state criterion reference test and 58 percent scored below *basic* in mathematics. At Wright Elementary, the percent of fourth graders scoring below *basic* was 50 percent in English language arts and 51 percent in mathematics. Both schools have a high attendance rate: Tallulah, 95 percent and Wright, 96 percent.

The staffing at each school maintains some indication of the former ethnic disparity. At Tallulah Elementary, 65 percent of the teachers are white and 35 percent are African American. At Wright Elementary, 88 percent of the teachers are African American and 12 percent are white. Slightly more than half (53 percent) of the teachers at Tallulah Elementary and slightly more than third (37 percent) of the teachers at Wright Elementary have master's degrees. The superintendent has been in his position for five years. The principal at Tallulah Elementary also has been in his position for five years, the principal at Wright has been there one year.

During the negotiation and solicitation of Madison district as a site, the decision was made at the district level to focus on reading in these two schools at the pre-Kindergarten–grade 3 level. The district already had a focus on mathematics, and it was judged that SEDL could be of assistance in reading. At both the school and district level, *Data Scan* has been completed and *Systems Exploration* has not yet begun. SEDL is working with the district and the two elementary schools on establishing leadership teams.

**Monroe City Public Schools**. Monroe is the business, medical, and educational hub for the rural parishes in northeastern Louisiana. The area is served by the Monroe Regional Airport with four major carriers and the University of Louisiana at Monroe. Monroe is located on Interstate 20 and is approximately 75 miles west of Vicksburg, Mississippi. The per capita income in Monroe is $23,061. The ethnic distribution of the parish is 64 percent white, 34 percent African American, and 2 percent other.

The Monroe City Schools is one of two districts in the state that is a municipal district. The district enrollment approximates 11,000 students in 20 schools. It serves students from pre-Kindergarten–grade 12. The district is a minority majority district with approximately 90 percent of its students African American. The per pupil expenditure in 1999–2000 was $5,286.

SEDL is working with two schools in this district, Barkdull Faulk Elementary and Jefferson Upper Elementary. Both schools enroll approximately 350 students that are African American. The first elementary has 99 percent of its students on free or reduced lunch and the second has 94 percent of its students.

According to the 2001 Louisiana accountability ratings, Monroe city has one elementary school in *school of academic achievement,* four schools (three elementary and one high school) in *academically above the state average,* thirteen schools (11 elementary and two high schools) in *academically below the state average,* and two elementary schools in *corrective action.* These two elementary schools are Barkdull Faulk and Jefferson Upper, the two campus sites selected for SEDL work. Barkdull Faulk tested 37 students in fourth grade mathematics, 62 percent scored below *basic.* Jefferson Upper has been recently reorganized and does not have report data, but is in *corrective action* from students' scores at their previous schools. The attendance rate for both schools meets state expectations: Barkdull Faulk at 94.9 percent and Jefferson Upper Elementary at 95.6 percent.

The faculty of Barkdull Faulk is 67 percent white and 33 percent African American; the faculty at Jefferson is 63 percent African American, 32 percent white, and 5 percent Asian American. Half (50 percent) of Barkdull Faulk faculty have master's degrees; no data are available for Jefferson. The superintendent has been in his position for ten years. Both principals have been assigned to their current schools for two years, though both have served as principals and in other roles in the district.

Work in Monroe is just getting underway with *Data Scan* currently being conducted. Both schools are working on mathematics — an area of attention compelled by the state accountability scores. Building leadership teams is a focus at both the district and school levels, with a strong superintendent heading the district.

**New Mexico**

The state board of education in New Mexico includes ten members elected from the districts and five appointed by the governor; the board appoints the state superintendent of schools. The state department of education is responsible for implementing the board's policy. Current issues of the state include recruiting additional teachers and raising salaries, expanding the number of districts with full day Kindergarten programs, building and facilities maintenance and replacement, and expanding the number of charter schools.

The state has been in the process of standards development since 1991, with revisions recently in the school year 1999–2000. These standards were influenced and based on national standards in the core areas, with revisions and input from school staff, state department, outside experts,

university faculty, and community members. They describe the knowledge and skills all students should acquire in the content areas.

Norm-referenced tests are used at the various grades in various subjects to assess student progress. The Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills Terra Nova is used in grades 3–9. The New Mexico High School Proficiency Exam, an exit test, is administered at grade 10. These tests assess student performance in reading, mathematics, science, and social studies. In addition, writing is assessed at grades 4, 6, and 10. Results are to be used for diagnostic purposes, to inform parents and the community, and to serve as part of the accountability system.

Accreditation and accountability are woven together and a series of four ratings are based on student assessment, student attendance, student dropout, school safety, and parent/community involvement. There are financial rewards for schools making substantial improvement. The state department assigns a team to all schools who are in the second year of *probationary* status, which is the lowest rating. If no improvement occurs after three years, the state can take over the school and/or district. Districts must provide the community an annual report card that includes items specified by the state department, plus others as determined by the individual district.

Each district must develop an Educational Plan for Student Success (EPSS); the creation of the plan involves all stakeholders, and the plan is intended to support the implementation of the state's standards. Each school must develop a site EPSS that is tied directly to the district plan, and includes the identification of student needs and analyses of current programs, goals and focus areas. It also includes an action plan and ongoing assessment processes, as well as comprehensive and periodic evaluation strategies. The state department review team must approve the model used by the district.

**SEDL Sites in New Mexico**

Four districts have been identified in New Mexico and of these Central Consolidated has the largest enrollment of students, with Hatch the smallest.

**Bernalillo Public Schools**. Bernalillo is the historical center of the state of New Mexico with occupation reaching back almost a thousand years. Situated at the foot of the Sandia Mountains, nine miles north of Albuquerque and beside the state's major river, the Rio Grande, it has progressed from a string of haciendas along the river in the 1600's to a commercial center of trade among the pueblos and the Mexican settlers in the 1800's. The main street in Bernalillo has also been known as Route 66, El Camino Real, and Old Highway 85. Seven pueblos are in the area of Bernalillo, each with different histories and rich cultures. Most citizens of Bernalillo work in service positions, or in one of the numerous local casinos. The county per capita income is $27,253.

# New Mexico

| | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| General District Information | Name | Bernalillo | | Central Consolidated | | Española | | Hatch | |
| | Type Location | Urban Fringe Large City | | Rural Outside MSA | | Rural Outside MSA | | Rural Inside MSA | |
| | No. of Schools | 9 | | 16 | | 15 | | 6 | |
| | No. of Teachers | 231 | | 434 | | 304 | | 88 | |
| | Percent of Teachers Certified | N/A | | N/A | | N/A | | N/A | |
| | No. of Students | 3,478 | | 7,222 | | 4,946 | | 1,550 | |
| | Per Capita Income | $27,253 | | $18,153 | | $15,115 | | $17,321 | |
| | Per Pupil Expenditure | $5,916 | | $5,048 | | $5,320 | | $4,897 | |
| | Focus of SEDL's Work | Reading | | Reading | | Reading | | Reading | |
| General School Information | Name | Algodones Elementary | Bernalillo Middle | Newcomb Middle | Newcomb High | Española Valley High | N/A | Hatch Valley Middle | Hatch Valley High |
| | Grade Range | K–6 | 6–8 | 6–8 | 9–12 | 9–12 | N/A | 6–8 | 9 - 12 |
| | Focus of SEDL Work | Reading | Reading | Reading | Reading | Reading | N/A | Reading | Reading |
| | No. of Teachers | 11 | 39 | 26 | 34 | 60 | N/A | 25 | 31 |
| | Percent with Advanced Degrees | 91[a] | 95[a] | N/A | N/A | 34 | N/A | 33[b] | 33[b] |
| | No. of Students | 156 | 500 | 268 | 373 | 1,105 | N/A | 350 | 450 |
| | Percent of Students Qualify for Free/Reduced Lunch | 93 | 95 | 97 | 93 | 73 | N/A | 79[b] | 79[b] |
| Race/Ethnicity of Students (percent) | African American | 0.7 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.2 | N/A | 0.0 | 0.2 |
| | American Indian | 53.2 | 25.2 | 98.5 | 100 | 5.9 | N/A | 0.0 | 0.0 |
| | Asian American | 0.0 | 0.2 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.9 | N/A | 0.0 | 0.2 |
| | Hispanic | 41.0 | 58.4 | 0.4 | 0.0 | 88.0 | N/A | 88.0 | 86.3 |
| | White | 5.1 | 16.2 | 1.1 | 0.0 | 5.0 | N/A | 12.0 | 13.3 |

[a] These numbers represent the percentages of teachers who are certified, not the percentages with advanced degrees.
[b] This number is the district percentage. Percentages are not available for individual schools.

The Bernalillo Public School District is comprised of nine schools that serve 3,478 students. Poverty levels are high, turnover of staff is a consistent issue, and student achievement places the students in the lowest 10 percent in the state. The district includes one high school, two middle schools, five elementaries, and one school that serves students from Kindergarten to grade 8. SEDL is working in Algodones Elementary School and Bernalilllo Middle School. The per pupil expenditure in the district in 2000–2001 was $5,916.

Algodones Elementary has a student population of 156 students in Kindergarten–grade 6 with 53 percent of the students listing American Indian as their ethnicity, 41 percent as Hispanic, 5 percent white, and 1 percent other. Ninety-three percent of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch. Almost three-fifths of the students (58 percent) are designated limited English proficient (LEP). The student attendance rate for 1999–2000 was 93.6 percent.

Bernalillo Middle School serves 500 students in grades 6–8 who reside in Sandia Pueblo, Santa Ana Pueblo, San Felipe Pueblo, Algodones, Placitas, and the town of Bernalillo. Ethnically, 58 percent of the students are Hispanic, 25 percent are American Indian, 16 percent are white, and 3 percent are other. Approximately 95 percent qualify for free or reduced lunch and 67 percent are designated as LEP. Student daily attendance is 92 percent.

As noted above, Bernalillo was ranked in the lowest 10 percent in the state. Bernalillo was ranked from a low of 82 to a high of 67 out of the 89 school districts in New Mexico on their grade level performances on the CTBS (grades 3–9). The average ranking was 78 out of 89 districts (with 1 being the highest ranking).

At Algodones there are eleven classroom teachers. About half (52 percent) are white, 28 percent are American Indian, and 20 percent are Hispanic. At Bernalillo, almost half of the 39 teachers are white, 45 percent are Hispanic, and 2 percent are Asian American. All of the teachers at these two schools are certified except for one at the elementary school and two at the middle school. The superintendent has been in his position for six years, the middle school principal for four years, and the elementary principal is in her first.

Reading was chosen as the focus at both Algodones and Bernalillo because of their low performance in that area. This decision was made at the superintendent level. The elementary school, middle school, and district have each formed leadership teams. The elementary school team includes the principal and teachers; parents are invited but not members of the team. The middle school team consists of the principal, teachers and some parents, in addition to instructional aides (the makeup of this team provides diversity). The district level central accountability team includes the superintendent, ten principals, four teachers, one to two parents, and central office staff. At the district and elementary school, planning is under way to conduct *Systems Exploration*: identifying members to be involved, the issues, tasks, and dates for scheduling. The middle school has completed these tasks and has scheduled two leadership team meetings on specified issues.

**Central Consolidated School District**. The Central Consolidated School District is a geographically widespread district (approximately 3,100 square miles) that covers several towns in the northwest corner of New Mexico, including Kirtland, Newcomb, and Shiprock. Nearly all

of the district (96 percent) lies within the Navajo Nation Reservation. The economic base for the community is primarily agriculture and ranching with some mining, small business, and Navajo Nation government and enterprise. The per capita income is $18,153.

Central Consolidated serves a total of 7,222 students in ten elementary schools, three junior/middle schools, three senior high schools. The ethnic composition of the students in the district is predominately American Indian (between 88 and 100 percent depending upon the school). Approximately three-fourths (77 percent) of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch. The per pupil expenditure in 2000–2001 was $5,048.

SEDL is working with Newcomb Middle and High Schools. Although officially listed as two separate schools, they operate as one entity. There are 268 students at the middle school and 373 students at the high school. Almost all of the students are American Indian and almost all qualify for free or reduced lunch. Attendance rates at the middle and high schools are 93 and 91 percent respectively. The high school dropout rate is 1.5 percent. Fourteen percent of the students are designated limited English proficient.

According to the New Mexico Department of Education, half of the 16 schools in Central Consolidated are on *probationary* status, six schools *meet expectations* and two *exceed expectations*. Both Newcomb Middle School and Newcomb High School, the schools with which SEDL is working, were rated as *probationary* and both held status of *newly identified for performance warning* at the beginning of the 2000–2001 school year. The 2001 state report shows Newcomb High School has been removed from the probationary list, but the middle school remains and now has the status of *newly identified for school improvement* which requires more comprehensive improvement actions at the district and school levels. The middle and high school students scored below the 40$^{th}$ percentile in reading on the state test for the past two school years. Language arts scores for the two schools were also below the 40$^{th}$ percentile during those periods. A majority of the students are English second language learners and lack sufficient language literacy skills.

The Central Consolidated School District employs 39 administrators, directors and coordinators, approximately 434 certified staff and 499 non-certified personnel. Sixty teachers are assigned to the two schools that are working with SEDL. The faculty race/ethnicity composition at the two schools is 89 percent white, 9 percent American Indian, and 2 percent Hispanic. The superintendent has been in her position for three years and the middle and high school principals for six years each.

SEDL's work focuses on reading at both sites. When work began, three leadership teams were already formed: at the district, high school, and middle school. SEDL has been working with members from these teams as one group to facilitate coherence, communications and shared leadership. The work is in the *Data Scan* stage, collecting and analyzing interview and test data.

**Espanola Public School District**. The Espanola Public School District is a rural district, encompassing approximately 144 square miles in Rio Arriba County. It is located in the Rio Grande river valley in north central New Mexico between two mountain ranges. The school district serves the city of Espanola (population 14,568) and a number of outlying communities

including Abiquiu, Alcalde, Chimayo, Dixon, Truchas, and Velarde. The majority of the community are Hispanic. It is a poor community with an economic base of light farming, ranching, retail and service businesses, and some tourism. The largest nearby employer is the Los Alamos National Laboratory (birthplace of the atomic bomb) which is located in a neighboring school district. Espanola is also home to the Northern New Mexico Community College and a regional hospital. The school district gets both fiscal support and technical assistance, especially in the area of technology, from the Los Alamos National Laboratory. The per capita income for the county was $15,115 in 2000.

The district has one Kindergarten center, 11 elementary schools, two middle schools and one high school. SEDL is working at Espanola High School and the district. The high school enrolls 1,105 students, 88 percent are Hispanic, 6 percent American Indian, and 5 percent white. Although 80 percent of the students are bilingual, only 8 percent are classified as limited English proficient. Seventy-three percent of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch. The 2000–2001 district per pupil expenditure was $5,320.

In the state accountability system, Espanola high school has been designated as *performance warned* based on a probationary level student performance in all five areas tested on the 9th grade norm-referenced test (CTBS/Terra Nova) and a high dropout rate (12.5 percent – the second highest in the state). The attendance rate is relatively low as well at 90 percent.

The faculty at the high school is 65 percent Hispanic, 31 percent white, 2 percent African American, and 2 percent American Indian. About one-third (34 percent) have advanced degrees. Both the superintendent and high school principal are in their second years in these positions.

At the high school, data were examined and literacy was identified as the initial focus for working with SEDL. *Site Entry* and *Data Scan* have been completed and a school leadership team has been identified to work through the *Systems Exploration* process. SEDL is working with the principal and the high school to align curriculum. The district does not have a district leadership team but has convened a dropout task force (Stay In School Blue Ribbon Task Force) which is examining the underlying causes of the high dropout rate and will make recommendations to the school board on ways to address those causes.

**Hatch Valley School District**. Hatch is a rural community with a population of 1,700 located in south-central New Mexico approximately 35 miles north of Las Cruces, NM and 80 miles from El Paso, TX along the Rio Grande River. Agricultural-related jobs and the school district are the major sources of local employment, with some individuals commuting to surrounding job sites in Las Cruces, White Sands Missile Range, and El Paso. The per capita income is $17,321. The district includes the village of Hatch and a large amount of surrounding farm and range land.

The school district has a student population of 1,550 students housed in an elementary school in a smaller community 15 miles further north and in five campuses in the Hatch community. SEDL staff are focusing on the secondary schools, with a student population of 350 students at Hatch Valley Middle School, and 450 attending Hatch Valley High School. The students are 89 percent Hispanic, 10 percent white and the remaining 1 percent spread among American Indian,

Asian American, and other. Seventy-nine percent of the students receive free or reduced meals. The dropout rate is 8 percent. Attendance at Hatch Middle School averages 87 percent and Hatch High School averages 79 percent daily attendance. The 2000–2001 per pupil expenditure was $4,897 in the district.

New Mexico rank orders the 89 public school districts on a number of criteria, including poverty, student performance on standardized tests, and dropout rates. Hatch Valley Schools data indicates the district is rated in the lowest quartile in all described areas. At the middle school, CTBS scores ranked the 6th grade at 80th of 89 districts. At the high school, results of the high school proficiency exam placed the district at 82nd out of 89 districts. Sixty-five percent of the student population is provided bilingual/English as a Second Language instruction.

The teaching staff is 60 percent white, 39 percent Hispanic and 1 percent American Indian. Sixty-seven percent of the teachers have bachelors degrees and 33 percent have masters. Five district building or central office administrators are Hispanic and three are white. The superintendent and middle school principal have been in their positions for two years. The high school principal has been in his position for four years.

The focus of the work is reading in both the middle and high schools, where the state achievement test scores were lowest. Although the elementary schools had received a substantial reading improvement grant, there has been virtually no follow-up at the secondary level. SEDL is working in the *System Exploration* stage, identifying root causes with the leadership team. The middle school is developing rubrics and the high school is examining data disaggregation.

**Oklahoma**

A number of entities provide leadership and oversight for education in Oklahoma. A secretary of education is appointed by the Oklahoma governor and this person administers the Office of Accountability and reviews the state department of education's work. The state department of education is led by an elected state superintendent. The state board of education is comprised of seven members appointed by the governor. The Commission on Teacher Preparation established standards for a competency-based teacher preparation system, created a new assessment for teacher candidates, and is responsible for implementing a system of professional development institutes. There are two types of school districts in the state: independent districts pre-Kindergarten–grade 12 and elementary districts, pre-Kindergarten–grade 8.

Standards have been established to provide educators with a minimum curriculum. These standards address a variety of content areas and grade levels, and they indicate the content or competency elements that need to be addressed at the grade/content level. Standards have been developed for language arts, reading, science, mathematics, social studies, languages, health/safety and physical education, information literacy (library/research), the arts, instructional technology, and technology education/hands-on career exploration.

For assessment purposes, two types of tests are given: norm-referenced and criterion-referenced. These are administered at established grade levels for specific content areas. Norm-referenced

tests are given for reading, mathematics, and language arts at grades 3 and 4. Criterion-referenced tests and end-of-instruction tests are in the process of being designed for grades 5, 8, and 9–12 for various content areas. Four levels of performance on these state tests have been identified: *advanced, satisfactory, limited knowledge, unsatisfactory.*

For accountability purposes, data are disaggregated by ethnicity, gender, migrant status, and student with disabilities. In 1999–2000, the state first publicly reported disaggregated data of exams at the district level. A school is designated as low performing if more than 30 percent of students score at the *unsatisfactory* level on both reading/English and mathematics criterion-referenced tests or secondary end-of-instruction tests. Schools that are designated low-performing for three years in succession are tagged *high challenged.* Such low-performing schools must review their comprehensive local education plan, update it or develop one. In so doing, the school analyzes and interprets all past scores to determine achievement progress of students, and identifies areas of strength and areas in which immediate and long range action is needed. In the plan, the mission, goals, objectives, and specific strategies and tasks that are needed to accomplish school improvement in all areas are indicated. In addition the identification of the human, financial, and other resources currently available and needed for future accomplishments of the goal and objectives, and implementation of strategies, are articulated.

The comprehensive local education plan was new for the 2000–2001 school year. This four-year education plan is developed by the district, approved by the local board and submitted to the state board of education once every four years, though the district is required to review the document each year. The plan is created by an advisory planning committee that includes parents and teachers, and addresses school improvement, professional development, capital improvement, alternative education, and reading sufficiency.

**SEDL Sites in Oklahoma**

Three districts in Oklahoma have been identified for partnering with SEDL. Of these, Kinta is the smallest with 207 students and Putnam City the largest with 20,000; the student population in Altus falls in between.

**Altus Public Schools**. Altus is located in the heart of Oklahoma's Great Plains Country. This rural community of 22,000 is situated in southwest Oklahoma just north of the Texas border. The community of Altus is the county seat of Jackson County. Oklahoma City, capital of Oklahoma, is located 139 miles to the northeast. Altus Air Force Base, home to the 97th Air Mobility Wing, provides a sound economic base for the community. In addition there is farming, food processing industries, and small farms. Jackson County is one of the state's leading agricultural producers with wheat, cotton, and cattle. The per capita income for the county was reported at $21,613 in 2000–2001.

The district has five elementary schools (Kindergarten–grade 5); a mid-high (grades 6–7); junior high (8–9); high school (10–12); alternative school; and special learning center for special education, Title 1 and parent education. The district serves approximately 2,200 students in the

# Oklahoma

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|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| General District Information | Name | Altus | | Kinta | | Putnam City | |
| | Type Location | Small Town | | Rural Outside MSA | | Large Central City | |
| | No. of Schools | 10 | | 2 | | 29 | |
| | No. of Teachers | 293 | | 16 | | 1,400 | |
| | Percent of Teachers Certified | N/A | | N/A | | N/A | |
| | No. of Students | 4,300 | | 176 | | 20,000 | |
| | Per Capita Income | $21,613 | | $17,617 | | $26,297 | |
| | Per Pupil Expenditure | $4,783 | | N/A | | $6,025 | |
| | Focus of SEDL's Work | Reading | | Reading | | Reading | |
| General School Information | Name | Eugene Elementary | N/A | Kinta Elementary | Kinta High | Western Oaks Middle | Putnam City West High |
| | Grade Range | K–5 | N/A | preK–8 | 9–12 | 6–8 | 9–12 |
| | Focus of SEDL Work | Reading | N/A | Reading | Reading | Reading | Reading |
| | No. of Teachers | 17 | N/A | 9 | 6 | 47 | 108 |
| | Percent with Advanced Degrees | 50 | N/A | 14 | 3 | 25 | 31 |
| | No. of Students | 231 | N/A | 126 | 50 | 644 | 1761 |
| | Percent of Students Qualify for Free/Reduced Lunch | 83 | N/A | 89 | 80 | 41 | 18 |
| Race/Ethnicity of Students (percent) | African American | 20.8 | N/A | 11.2 | 8.0 | 15.2 | 16.4 |
| | American Indian | 1.3 | N/A | 32.8 | 36.0 | 6.7 | 5.1 |
| | Asian American | 1.7 | N/A | 0.9 | 0.0 | 4.2 | 3.1 |
| | Hispanic | 43.7 | N/A | 3.4 | 0.0 | 7.6 | 8.6 |
| | White | 32.5 | N/A | 51.7 | 56.0 | 66.3 | 66.8 |

elementary schools, 5,600 in mid-high, 600 in junior high, and 900 in high school. The ethnicity of the student population for the district is primarily white (63 percent) followed by Hispanic (20 percent), African American (13 percent), American Indian (2 percent), and Asian American (2 percent). Each elementary school is served by one principal; the middle, junior, and high school each have a principal and assistant principal on staff. The average number of days of absence in the district is 7.7 per student. The dropout rate for the district was reported at 1.3 percent. The per pupil expenditure was $4,783 in 2000–2001.

SEDL is working at Eugene Fields Elementary School. It serves 231 students in Kindergarten–grade 5. Almost 44 percent of the students are Hispanic, 33 percent are white, and 21 percent are African American. Over 80 percent of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch. Almost one-fifth of the students (19 percent) are classified limited English proficient.

At Eugene Fields, state student assessment scores in the third grade revealed that 65 percent of all the students passed reading, 71 percent language arts, and mathematics 73 percent. Fifth grade state assessment tests indicated that of all students taking the test, 46 percent fell below the *satisfactory* level in mathematics, 57 percent in reading, and 38 percent in writing. The reading scores of the Title I students especially showed a lack of adequate growth for the past year, which put the school on the Title I list of schools requiring focused attention. Mathematics scores are not very strong, but acceptable according to the state accountability system at the present time.

There are approximately 21 teachers assigned to the elementary school. The faculty is primarily white (94 percent); the remaining faculty are African American. All of the faculty are fully certified, and half have advanced degrees. The principal is white and in his third year as principal at this school. The superintendent is white and has been in his position for 11 years.

The district and school are working with SEDL on reading. At the district level, work with SEDL is in the *Systems Exploration* stage, in defining root causes derived from their identified problem statement. At the school level, building teams is the focus, with attention being given to understanding mathematics and reading student achievement data.

**Kinta Public Schools**. Kinta is located in Haskell County on the northern edge of the Choctaw Nation in East Central Oklahoma, 20 miles south of interstate I-40. Situated in a valley among the San Bois hills, it is surrounded by ranches and small farms. The population of Kinta is approximately 1,300, which has remained a relatively stable figure over the last decade as no new industry has located within the area. The 2000 county per capita income was $17,617.

This small rural school district serves 207 students in grades pre-Kindergarten–grade 12. Other than one special education teacher, there are no special programs beyond federally-funded formula-based programs such as Title I and Title VII Indian Education. Physically handicapped students from the district attend a countywide special education program in another community.SEDL is working with both the elementary and high school. Although the state recognizes the elementary and secondary schools as separate entities, the buildings adjoin each other and the faculty act as one. There is a mixed ethnic makeup of students with whites representing the largest percentage (53 percent), followed by American Indian (34 percent),

African American (10 percent), Hispanic (2 percent), and Asian American (1 percent). Most students come from low socioeconomic families with 86 percent eligible for free or reduced lunch. The average number of days absent per student was 8.2 for the district, with a 90 percent attendance rate. Student drop-out rates have not been reported.

Kinta schools have been classified as low performing by the state department of education for the past three years. Under the state accountability system, Kinta's academic performance for 2000–2001 was 380 on a scale of 1–1500. Kinta students scored at the 34th percentile in reading and at the 44th percentile in language for the school year 2000–2001. Twenty-eight percent of 5th grade Kinta students scored below the *satisfactory* level. High school students tested on the English exit test scored lower, with 73 percent scoring below *satisfactory* level. These factors contributed to the decision to focus on reading. The graduation rate reported for 2001 was 100 percent.

There are 8.6 teachers at the elementary school and 5.3 teachers at the high school. Fourteen percent of the teachers at the elementary school have advanced degrees, three percent have them at the high school. The faculty race/ethnicity matches that of the students. A superintendent/principal, a half-time assistant principal for the high school, and a half-time principal for the elementary school comprise the administrative staff. All three of these individuals are white. The superintendent has been in his position for six years, the high school assistant principal for one year, and the elementary principal for four years.

A district leadership team had been newly formed about one month prior to the start of the SEDL project. This team had little leadership experience, but was composed of representatives from district and school administration, teachers, parents, and the Kinta school board. Two additional members have been added, at SEDL's suggestion. SEDL works with this team, helping them to structure their work for reading improvement and assisting them in the development of their leadership roles, and in building capacity among the members to work as a functioning group. Attention has been given to orienting the team to its school improvement work. Kinta is currently in the *Data Scan* stage, collecting and interpreting data.

**Putnam City School District**. Putnam City Schools have been operating for more than 85 years in the northwest suburbs of Bethany and Warr Acres in Oklahoma City. The city is characterized as a large central city that is service-oriented in its economic base. Putnam City has a per capita income of $26,297 as reported in 1999. It is a close-knit community that resides and benefits from being on the fringe of a big city. The school district, once a suburban district, is now an urban school district. The minority population is increasing and the district is challenged to provide high-quality teachers who can teach diverse students. The district has slipped in its status as one of the premier school districts in Oklahoma – and wants that title back.

The district has about 20, 000 students in 18 elementary schools, 7 middle schools, 3 high schools, and 1 alternative high school. The two schools with which SEDL is working are Western Oaks Middle School and Putnam City West High School. The majority of students in the district and these schools is white with about 15 percent or less being minority – African American and Hispanic — although the number of African American students is increasing with

the appearance of public housing in the school communities. At Western Oaks Middle School, 41 percent of the students are eligible for free or reduced lunch, while 18 percent are eligible at Putnam City West High School. The per pupil expenditure was $6,025.

At the middle school, state assessment test scores revealed that of all students tested at the eighth grade, 24 percent were below *satisfactory* in mathematics, 21 percent in reading, and 14 percent in writing. The scores from the exit tests at the high school indicated 32 percent rated below *satisfactory* in English II and 23 percent in U.S. History. In 1998 the dropout rate at the high school was 7.4 percent, while 65.5 percent of the students graduated.

There are 47 faculty at Western Oaks and 108 faculty at Putnam City West High School. At Western Oaks, the faculty are all white; one quarter have advanced degrees. At West High School, 98 percent are white and 31 percent have advanced degrees. The superintendent and both principals are white. The superintendent has been in his position for three years, the middle school principal for eight years, and the high school principal for two years.

Putnam City School district is trying to regain its earlier premier status. Both schools decided to focus on reading since there is a lack of coherence in their Kindergarten–grade 12 reading programs and unacceptable student performance in reading. SEDL is currently working in the *Systems Exploration* stage with the district leadership team, exploring student achievement data in reading at the secondary school and district levels. Attention is also being given to building rapport among key leaders, especially the assistant superintendent and the middle school and high school principals. Distributed leadership is a goal, as is creating alignment in curriculum and instruction.

**Texas**

Members of the state board of education are elected from 15 regions across the state and its chair is appointed by the governor, as is the state commissioner of education. The state board sets overall education policy that is implemented by the Texas Education Agency (state department of education), headed by the commissioner of education. Large issues facing the current legislature are quality and availability of teachers, teacher health insurance, reading improvement, and social promotion.

There have been several iterations of standards identified by the state. In 1995, the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) (what students will be able to do) were the latest revision and replaced the Essential Elements (which specified what teachers are required to teach). TEKS are written for all courses at all grade levels; they are content standards for the curriculum areas. Resources were provided for implementation of the TEKS and districts were required to provide in-service on the TEKS to all professional staff. The TEKS and the mandated state test are aligned.

Since 1980 students in various grade levels were administered the Texas Assessment of Basic Skills (TABS). In 1986, students at these levels and additional ones took the Texas Educational Assessment of Minimal Skills (TEAMS). In 1991, the TAAS (Texas Assessment of Academic

Skills) was developed, and it was expanded in 1994 to additional grades. The TAAS assesses student mastery of the state curriculum. The TAAS is a criterion-referenced test with a minimal passing score at 70 percent for each subtest, and has moved from a basic skills focus to include higher order thinking skills.

An accountability system uses the *Academic Excellence Accountability* criteria which include attendance; drop out rates; and student passing rates in mathematics, reading, and writing. Data from the TAAS tests are disaggregated by gender, ethnicity, and race, and are provided to the district, and to the public at large through the TEA web site. Sanctions move along a continuum from warnings to loss of accreditation. TEA may visit a site, review and recommend changes to the plans, or place a monitor at the district. There is no single prescribed action the state follows for working with low-performing sites.

In 1990 the legislature shifted state control to local school boards, administrators, and site-based decision-making teams (SBDM) for school improvement planning. SBDM teams now have advisory power to the district over much of the school's curriculum design, methodology, budgeting, structure of the school day, staffing, and professional development. Requirements are specified for district-level trustees, district planning, campus planning and site-based decision-making, as well as for state responsibilities for the planning and decision-making process. Waivers may be requested for an exemption of requirements, restrictions, or prohibitions.

**SEDL Sites in Texas**

Four districts have been identified for partnerships with SEDL. The largest of these is Midland and the smallest is Calvert.

**Calvert Independent School District**. Calvert, TX is a rural community, with a population near 2,000, bisected by Texas Highway 6 approximately 60 miles south of Waco. A business brochure points with pride to information detailing Calvert being, in the 1880's, the fourth largest community in Texas. Today the area appears to be in economic distress and a division between different economic groups is clearly evident. The major sources of work include farming and ranching, antique and crafts businesses, and a number of restored Victorian style homes have been converted into bed and breakfast sites. A number of people commute to nearby towns and cities for regular employment. The 2000 per capita income was reported at $17,525 for the county. The school district is the largest single employer in the community.

Calvert ISD has 325 students enrolled in pre-Kindergarten–grade 12. Spigner Elementary School has 195 students in pre-Kindergarten–grade 6, and Calvert High School has 130 students in grades 7–12. Community members report that a number of school age children living in Calvert currently attend school in surrounding areas. At the elementary school, 85 percent of the students are African American, 10 percent of the students are Hispanic, and 5 percent are white. At the high school, 82 percent are African American, 11 percent white, and 6 percent Hispanic. Ninety-three percent of the students receive free or reduced meals. Attendance for students has been between 95 and 96 percent for the previous five years for all student groups, and the dropout rate has been between 1.5 and 3.5 percent over the same period of time. The per pupil expenditure was $4,410 in 2000–2001.

# Texas

| | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| General District Information | Name | Calvert | | Midland | | Nova | | Tornillo | |
| | Type Location | Rural Outside MSA | | Midsize City | | Large Central City | | Urban Fringe Large City | |
| | No. of Schools | 2 | | 35 | | 2 | | 3 | |
| | No. of Teachers | 27 | | 1,384 | | 20 | | 63 | |
| | Percent of Teachers Certified | N/A | | N/A | | N/A | | N/A | |
| | No. of Students | 325 | | 20,522 | | 289 | | 890 | |
| | Per Capita Income | $17,525 | | $21,536 | | $36,553 | | $18,535 | |
| | Per Pupil Expenditure | $4,410 | | $5,682 | | $3,502 | | $5,486 | |
| | Focus of SEDL's Work | Reading | | Reading | | Reading | | Reading | |
| General School Information | Name | W.D. Spigner Elementary | Calvert High | Bush Elementary | Midland Freshman High | Oak Cliff | Southeast | Tornillo Middle | Tornillo High |
| | Grade Range | preK–6 | 7–12 | K–6 | 9 | preK–2 | preK–5 | 6–8 | 9–12 |
| | Focus of SEDL Work | Reading | Reading | Reading | Reading | Reading | Reading | Reading | Reading |
| | No. of Teachers | 15.3 | 11.5 | 36.8 | 46.3 | 5 | 15 | 17 | 21.6 |
| | Percent with Advanced Degrees | 12[a] | 12[a] | 23[a] | 23[a] | 15[a] | 15[a] | 89[b] | 63[b] |
| | No. of Students | 195 | 130 | 548 | 804 | 74 | 215 | 251 | 277 |
| | Percent of Students Qualify for Free/Reduced Lunch | 93[a] | 93[a] | 42 | 43 | 95 | 64 | 96[a] | 96[a] |
| Race/Ethnicity of Students (percent) | African American | 85.1 | 82.3 | 7.3 | 9.6 | 39.2 | 67.0 | 1.8 | 0.4 |
| | American Indian | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.5 | 0.2 | 5.4 | 0.9 | 0.0 | 0.0 |
| | Asian American | 0.0 | 0.0 | 1.1 | 0.5 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 |
| | Hispanic | 10.3 | 6.2 | 32.3 | 43.3 | 52.7 | 28.4 | 97.3 | 98.4 |
| | White | 4.6 | 11.5 | 58.8 | 46.4 | 2.7 | 3.7 | 0.9 | 1.2 |

[a] This number is the district percentage. Percentages are not available for individual schools.

[b] These numbers represent the percentages of teachers who are certified, not the percentages with advanced degrees.

In the 1999–2000 state accountability report, Calvert was listed as *low performing*, making this the second year for this designation. State assessment tests administered in the two schools revealed the following: at Spigner, the passing rate for all students was 67 percent in reading, 72 percent in mathematics, and 76 percent for writing. At Calvert High School, students passing were 80 percent in reading, 65 percent in mathematics and 82 percent in writing.

The district lists three administrators who are African American and all are in the first year in their current position. The superintendent had been the high school principal for a year and a half prior to taking his present position. The two principals are new to the district. The faculty is almost evenly split, 51 percent are white and 49 percent are African American. Eighty-eight percent of the professional staff have earned bachelors degrees and 12 percent have earned masters degrees.

The schools decided to work on reading based on student achievement results. Site work is currently in the *System Exploration* stage. Attention is being given to sharing district and school data with the teams at the district and at both schools. The focus at the present time is increasing reading skills with an early direction of aligning what is being taught between the grade levels.

**Midland Independent School District**. Midland is located midway between Dallas/Fort Worth and El Paso on Interstate 20. Nearly a quarter of a million people reside in the Midland/Odessa metropolitan area. Midland serves as the administrative center for the petroleum-producing region known as the Permian Basin, where about 20 percent of America's oil and gas reserves are located in reservoirs deep beneath the surface. The per capita income in 2000 in the surrounding county was $21,536.

Midland is a growing district with 35 campuses and over 20,000 students. The district provides an instructional program for pre-Kindergarten–grade 12. Bush Elementary has a total of 548 students in grades Kindergarten–grade 6 and Midland Freshman High School serves a total of 804 students; these are the two schools that are working with SEDL. Almost 60 percent of the elementary school students are white, 32 percent are Hispanic, and 7 percent are African American, 41.8 percent receive free or reduced lunch, 8 percent are designated limited English proficient (LEP), and the attendance rate was 96.3 percent. Midland Freshman serves students in grade 9, 46 percent of its students are white, 43 percent are Hispanic, and 10 percent are African American, 43 percent of its students receive free or reduced lunch, 7 percent are designated LEP, and the attendance and dropout rates were 92.3 percent and 1.8 percent respectively. The per pupil expenditure was $5,682 in 2000–2001.

According to the state's report, the district is currently rated *academically acceptable*. Student scores on the state assessment tests at Bush Elementary revealed that 83 percent passed in reading, 80 percent in mathematics, and 82 percent in writing. Bush is a re-constituted school, with many of its students having attended a low-performing school prior to its re-constitution. Thus, many of the new students still face significant challenges and need help. At Midland Freshman, the percentage of students passing the tests were 91 percent in reading, 88 percent in mathematics, and 83 percent in writing. However, changing demographics in the district and predictive information supplied by TEA suggest that these two schools will become low performing unless focused intervention was provided.

There are 32 faculty assigned to Bush Elementary and 46 to Midland Freshman. The composition of the staff at Bush is 81 percent white, 18 percent Hispanic, and 1 percent African American. At Midland, 75 percent of the faculty are white, 16 percent Hispanic, and 9 percent African American. Approximately 23 percent of the faculty in the district hold advanced degrees. The superintendent is new to the district.

The district selected reading as the area of work at both schools. The district is working with SEDL in the *Systems Exploration* stage, and staff gathered evidence to determine the root causes of identified problems. The focus of attention is on alignment of the system and how leadership can guide its development.

**Nova Charter Schools**. In 1998 Nova Charter School opened its first open-enrollment campus in a high poverty section of southwest Dallas, TX, Oak Cliff. In 2000, it opened a second campus in a low to middle income area of southeast Dallas, Pleasant Grove. Both schools reside within the Dallas Independent School District boundaries, receive state and federal funds, and adhere to federal and state guidelines; however, they fall into a special category of Texas public schools, "charter schools" that are designed to meet the unique needs of a specific student population. Nova's goal is to provide a safe and moral environment for high minority, high poverty students and to promote parent and community involvement in the schools.

Nova Charter Schools serve students in two buildings. There are 74 students at the Oak Cliff site and 215 students at the Southeast site. Sixty percent of the students are African American, 35 percent Hispanic, 3 percent white, and 2 percent American Indian. Thirty-one percent of the Oak Cliff students are designated limited English proficient and 30 percent at Southeast. Sixty-four percent of the 289 students are eligible for free or reduced lunches: 95 percent at the Oak Cliff location and 64 percent at the Southeast location. The per pupil expenditure in 2000–2001 was $3,502.

As SEDL staff interacted with SEA personnel in identifying potential sites, Nova was identified because it represented a special category of schools in Texas, charter schools, that were not succeeding well with students. Charter schools, in the 1999–2000 school year, had a passing rate on the state accountability test of 37 percent, less than half the state average. Nova students, however, in grades 3–6, had a passing rate at the Oak Cliff campus in reading of 73 percent; writing, 40 percent; and mathematics, 63 percent. At the Southeast campus students scored in reading 76 percent; writing, 43 percent; and mathematics, 67 percent.

The teaching staff at the two schools is 60 percent African American, 34 percent Filipino, and 6 percent Hispanic. Only one of the 20 teachers is certified, three have advanced degrees. The superintendent started the charter school four years ago.

Nova's focus is on reading, due in part to the low writing scores (see above) that are associated with reading. On the Iowa Test of Basic Skills and state accountability tests, reading scores tend to decrease between grades two and three and continue to decline in grades four and five. The teachers and administrator readily acknowledge that they are not serving the reading needs of

their students. Initial intensive site work began in August 2001 with the formation of a leadership team. The site is now at the end of the *Systems Exploration* stage of the work with *Planning Action* as the next stage. Exploring reading achievement data and developing data analysis skills are high priorities, as well as curricular and instructional alignment in reading, and quality parent involvement.

**Tornillo Independent School District**. Tornillo is located thirty-five miles south of El Paso in southeastern El Paso county. The Rio Grande River boundary with Mexico runs two miles to the south, and Interstate Highway 10 is two miles to the north. A paved county access road connects Tornillo with the interstate. In 1916, Tornillo became the center of a rich agricultural district. The first large-scale cotton production began in 1918. In 1990 cotton was still the main crop, and the largest cotton gin in the state operated in Tornillo. It ginned 90 percent of the cotton grown in the El Paso Valley. Since 1970, a close second to cotton production is that of pecans. Other crops produced on a much smaller scale include chile, alfalfa, feed, grains, and onions. The county per capita income in 2000 was $18,535.

The Tornillo Independent School District has been an independent district since 1960. The district provides instruction to students in Kindergarten–grade 12. The district has experienced constant growth for the past six years with 616 students in 1995–96, to 1,075 in the school year 2001–02, almost doubling in size. The district enrolls 628 students at the elementary, 251 at the middle school, and 277 at the high school. Almost all the students are Hispanic (98 percent) and qualify for free or reduced lunch (96 percent). At the middle school, 36 percent of the students are designated limited English proficient and 32 percent at the high school. The per pupil expenditure in 2000–2001 was $5,486.

Tornillo Middle School is *low performing*, and had been designated as such for three years by the state accountability system. Its student test scores are as follows: 57 percent passing in reading, 77 percent passing in mathematics, and 40 percent in writing. The attendance rate was 97.3 percent. Tornillo High School was rated by the state accountability system as *low performing* when it was first recruited. Subsequent student test scores are: 61 percent passing in reading, 81 percent in mathematics, and 77 percent in writing. The school has a low percentage of students passing the end of course algebra test. The attendance and dropout rates were 94.2 percent and 1.2 percent respectively.

Tornillo Elementary was not one of the chosen campuses; however, due to the *low performing* status of the campus, and since it creates the foundation for most of the children, SEDL has included this campus as part of the work. The campus has approximately 595 students, 96 percent qualify for free or reduced lunch, and 52.8 percent are designated limited English proficient.

Tornillo has 17 faculty at the middle school and 21.6 faculty at the high school. Two-thirds (67 percent) of the middle school faculty are Hispanic, 28 percent are white, and 5 percent African American; 89 percent are certified. At the high school, 74 percent of the faculty are Hispanic and 26 percent white; 63 percent are certified. The superintendent is in her third year at the district as is the middle school principal. The high school principal is in his second year. The superintendent and middle school principals are white; the high school principal is Hispanic.

Currently the work is at the *Systems Exploration* stage at the district level, with *Systems Exploration* beginning at the middle school. *Site Entry* is the stage of work at the other school. The focus of attention is on building leadership teams that are learning to dig deeper into issues, to use data for diagnostic purposes, and to purposefully look for solutions that will be long lasting.

**Summary**

In partnership with the Charles A. Dana Center at The University of Texas at Austin, SEDL is working in sites across its five-state region to transform low-performing schools into high-performing learning communities. The activities and experiences at these field sites are expected to produce rich information from which SEDL can construct procedural knowledge that will guide other sites in the future in their transformation efforts.

Across its region as noted, SEDL was working in 17 sites by the end of FY01, with four sites engaged in Arkansas, New Mexico, and Texas; three sites in Oklahoma; and two in Louisiana. To fill out the complete roster of sites in each state, two sites in Louisiana and one in Oklahoma are currently (first quarter, FY02) in the beginning stages of work with SEDL.

Most of the sites are composed of a district team and two schools associated with the district. The exceptions are Espanola, NM, where the work focuses on a single large high school, and Altus, OK where the work takes place in an elementary school.

The district sites range widely in size as indicated by student population and concomitantly, number of teachers. Some sites are exceptionally small. These are Grady (AR), Kinta (OK), and Nova and Calvert (TX); each has less than 500 students. Two others, Marked Tree (AR) and Tornillo (TX) have less than 1,000 students. Six additional districts (Green Forest, AR; Madison, LA; Bernalillo, NM; Espanola, NM; Hatch, NM; and Altus, OK) have less than 5,000 students and two districts (Pine Bluff, AR and Central Consolidated, NM) have less than 10,000. The three remaining districts (Monroe, LA; Putnam City, OK; and Midland, TX) have more than 10,000 students.

The needs and demands of these districts are quite similar; most of the schools are high poverty, low performing, with high percentages of minority population students. While a few of the sites are not currently in such stressful situations, population changes and economic factors predict the strong possibility of decline in student outcome data. Thus, these schools are working to "hedge their bets" against such a downturn; these are Green Forest (AR), Putnam City (OK), and Midland (TX).

SEDL's five-state region is one of significant ethnic and minority diversity and the sites' student population expresses this. High percentages of African American students are found in Arkansas (Grady and Pine Bluff), Louisiana (Madison and Monroe), and Texas (Calvert and Nova). Over 40 percent of the total number of students are Hispanic in New Mexico (Bernalillo, Espanola, Hatch), Oklahoma (Altus), and Texas (Tornillo). American Indian populations claim high percentages in New Mexico (Bernalillo and Central Consolidated) and Oklahoma (Kinta).

Eight of the seventeen sites are designated as rural (see charts). Three are labeled small towns, two as mid-size city, two urban fringe of a large city, and two in a large central city. When sites determined whether their focus of improvement would be reading or mathematics, 27 schools selected reading and five mathematics.

Each of the sites has been described in this report and it appears that each is well launched in the improvement work with SEDL. An end-of-year report of FY 2002 will be more informative about the substance of that work.

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